



Luke 11:14–22

14 Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed. 15 But some of them said, ‘By Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons.’ 16 Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven.

17 Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: ‘Any kingdom divided

against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. 18 If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebul. 19 Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. 20 But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

21 'When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. 22 But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armour in which the man trust-

ed and divides up his plunder.

Reflection

Today's passage comes from Luke 11:14–22,

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Nobel Prize-winning British author William Golding's famous 1950's novel *Lord of the Flies* asks deep questions of our hu-

man nature. During a wartime evacuation a British aeroplane crashes on a remote Pacific Island; the only survivors being a small group of pre-teen boys. Things start out innocently enough but soon the reader is shocked and horrified at the changes that begin to come over the children. What follows is a sharp descent into feral, animalistic behaviour which results in the violent murder of one of their most vulnerable. Much of this is driven by intense paranoia that develops around the existence of a so-called 'beast' which they all slowly begin to believe exists on the island.

In a scene from which the book derives its name, after painting their faces and enacting bizarre rites including sacrificing to the beast one of the boys, Simon, finds

himself staring at an offering made to the beast: a pig's head, mounted on a sharpened stick that is swarming with flies. In his mind Simon begins to speak with the pig which he dubs 'Lord of the Flies'. The head mocks Simon's notion that the beast is a real entity, 'something you could hunt and kill', and reveals the truth: they, the boys, are the beast; it is inside them all.

The beast is inside them all. Stripped bare by their dire circumstances, innocence lost, the darkness that resides in each and every one of us (our sin nature), is revealed to Simon by the 'Lord of the Flies'.

The reason that this story comes to mind today is that 'Lord of the Flies' in Hebrew is Baal-zebub, a close derivation of the name used for Satan in today's passage.

The name is several times here by Luke so a little background is appropriate. Pagan cultures in Old Testament times worshipped Baal, referring to him as Beezebul which meant 'Baal the prince'. But in the Old Testament (2 Kings 1:2, 3, 6, 16) the name is rendered Baal-zebub, a deliberate distortion to mock the pagan God as the Lord of the Flies, or Baal the fly-god, the god of the dead, the god of dung and carrion. And in the first century the name had been taken and applied to Satan.

But however you weigh it, claiming that Jesus is in league with Beelzebul as the religious leaders do in our passage today was a calculated blasphemy of immense perversity – it would be harder to fathom a deeper insult from the mouths of Jewish religious leaders; testament to their

darkness within. At the end of Lord of the Flies when salvation finally arrives in the form of a British soldier the young boys snap out of their behaviour. In shame and sorrow we have the impression they can barely fathom what came over them, or rather, came out of them. The Jewish religious leaders in today's passage are similarly far gone, utterly blinded and bound by the darkness in their hearts.

Jesus has just performed another undeniable miracle. They've seen it with their own eyes. But they are blind to what the sign points to. And furthermore, their logic is corrupted. They claim that he must be casting out demons by Satan's power, which makes no sense at all. In Luke's Gospel alone are recorded ten instances of Jesus casting out demons. On one of these

occasions many demons were cast out of a huge crowd (Luke 4:41). The whole reason Jesus has come, with increasing clarity and visibility to anyone witnessing his ministry, is to defeat Satan, sin and death. He's recently sent out seventy-two missionaries to whom he also gave the power to drive out Satan's minions. To claim that Jesus is in league with Satan is plainly ludicrous. And yet it is the nature of our darkness within to suppress the truth.

Jesus, out of the mercy of his heart, offers two mini-parables to try and press home their illogical position. He speaks of kingdoms divided and strong-men bound but his imagery will be to no avail. Such is the state of their sin-hardened hearts as we'll see over the course of this week. In fact Chapter 11 will prove to be a dim chap-

ter in Luke's Gospel as Jesus exposes just how entrenched hypocrisy and wickedness has become in the Jewish religious establishment.

Think & Pray

But with what time remains this morning please meditate over the idea of the darkness within us all that is only held back by the grace of God. We see it when the rule of law no longer holds during periods of civil unrest. It seems like only a split second after a group of people realise that police and law enforcement are powerless to act that their actions descend into looting and violence. We see the darkness of our sin nature in what we do in secret. We see the darkness in times of desperation or when alcohol or another substance reduces our

inhibitions. Perhaps most disturbingly it even crops up inexplicably when all is going well. Consider also how blind and irrational sin can make us, suppressing truth in preference for lies. In our passage today we've seen Jewish religious leaders – the most educated, devout and Biblically versed people of their generation – mistaking the Son of God for one of Satan's minions even as Jesus frees some poor person from the clutches of Satan before their eyes.

How might sin be blinding you? What aspect of your life have you rationalised in a manner that defies all logic? It might be to do with your financial affairs. It might be to do with a relationship that you are in, in which you are not honouring God. It might be part of your secret life, something that

no one sees; something that only God can see. In the Lord of the Flies, innocent educated boys moments later are murdering the weakest amongst them. In this chapter of Luke, the leaders of the Jewish people murder the Son of God, the one they'd been waiting for, for centuries. What might your sin be leading to?

Spend some time of earnest repentance with our Lord this morning. Pray that by the power of his Spirit he might open your eyes and mine to the wickedness of our own hearts. Pray that we would never become complacent and that our own personal holiness would be one of the driving priorities of our life. But thank God also that we are no longer slaves to sin. Through the power of what Christ accomplished on the cross Satan, sin and death have

been defeated. The sin that so entangles us and blinds us has been conquered if we will reach out and ask for God's help in dealing with it; instead of indulging in it and regressing into our old ways. Pray for his help this morning and thank God for Jesus.